



TESTIMONY of TOTAL WINE & MORE

Before the General Law Committee

February 19, 2015

IN SUPPORT OF:

HB 6454, AN ACT AUTHORIZING PACKAGE STORES TO SELL CIGARS

**HB 5773, AN ACT ALLOWING NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS TO HOST ALCOHOLIC LIQUOR TASTINGS
AND RECEIVE DONATIONS OF ALCOHOLIC LIQUOR**

SB 875, AN ACT ESTABLISHING A CHEESE SHOP WINE RETAILER PERMIT

Senator Leone, Representative Baram, and members of the General Law Committee,

Total Wine & More is pleased to present this testimony in support of several bills on your agenda today. HB 6454 and SB 875 would both provide value and convenience to consumers and improve the customer experience by allowing the sale of complementary goods at a single location. HB 5773 complements Total Wine & More's philosophy of philanthropy and engagement in the communities in which we operate and our support for charitable causes.

The philosophy of Total Wine & More is all about the customer experience. Our stores are brightly lit with wide aisles that feature 8,000 wines, 3,000 spirits and 2,500 beers. Our team members are the best trained in the business and, while we offer all of the best national brands, we embrace local and regional products – featuring Connecticut and New England wines, beers and spirits on our shelves and sampling stations. In short, we strive to give customers that which they seek: outstanding service, phenomenal selection and the best prices.

HB 6454, AN ACT AUTHORIZING PACKAGE STORES TO SELL CIGARS

We believe that allowing package stores to sell items that are natural complements to each other makes good sense from a business perspective and provides much sought-after value and convenience to consumers. The concept before this committee, to allow package stores to sell cigars, makes eminent sense.

Nearly every state in the nation, and indeed in our neighboring states in the Northeast, has recognized the natural chemistry in allowing both alcoholic beverages and cigars to be sold at a single location. Connecticut has already recognized the value to this approach by permitting package stores to sell cigarettes and "small" cigars. There is no reason that regular cigars should not also be included.

Total Wine & More operates 113 stores in sixteen states across the country. **Every one of the fifteen states in which we operate, aside from Connecticut, permit wine retailers to sell cigars.** In addition, both Massachusetts and Rhode Island currently permit the sale of cigars in package stores.

Allowing for the sale of cigars in package stores makes even more sense in Connecticut, where shade tobacco grow in the Connecticut River Valley is used as wrapper leaves for the world's best cigars. As we have done for the local products that we currently carry, permitting the sale of cigars would allow us to promote and educate consumers about the quality of Connecticut-grown shade tobacco.

Accordingly, we urge the Committee to approve HB 6454, AN ACT AUTHORIZING PACKAGE STORES TO SELL CIGARS.

HB 5773, AN ACT ALLOWING NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS TO HOST ALCOHOLIC LIQUOR TASTINGS AND RECEIVE DONATIONS OF ALCOHOLIC LIQUOR

Philanthropy and corporate responsibility are foundational principles for Total Wine & More. Over the past two decades, Total Wine & More has proudly supported local, regional, and national charitable organizations by making nearly \$50 million of in-kind and monetary donations. In 2014, Total Wine & More partnered with over 5,700 charitable organizations around the nation providing them with \$5.3 million of in-kind and cash donations and helping those charities raise in excess of \$32 million for their organization's causes. Among the activities that we sponsor, when permitted, is larger community charity galas and local product-related festivals.

HB 5773 would support Total Wine & More's commitment to giving back to the community and supporting local charitable organizations in Connecticut. Accordingly, we urge the Committee's support for this bill.

SB 875, AN ACT ESTABLISHING A CHEESE SHOP WINE RETAILER PERMIT

As we testified previously before this Committee on HB 5349, AN ACT ESTABLISHING A CHEESE SHOP WINE AND BEER PERMIT, allowing for the sale of wine and cheese together, be it in a package store or in cheese shop, allows for a value-added consumer experience, as customers will be able to receive expert and knowledgeable advice regarding various wine-cheese pairings, and staff will be able to guide consumers by reference to products right in front of them. Accordingly, we urge the Committee's support for this bill.

CONCLUSION

At the end of the day, any successful business is about providing the highest level of service and value to its customers. This is especially important in our current day and age, where individuals have less time than ever outside of work and family obligations to run errands and shop. Providing an additional layer of convenience for customers to access both products and information is good for both consumers and businesses.

We urge the Committee to approve these three bills.